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ABSTRACT

Although a growing literature base about women's involvement in the outdoors has emerged in the past 10 years, little attention has been given to gender analyses related to the social meanings of being female in a changing society. Five focus group interviews with a total of 36 women focused on past, present, and future involvement in the outdoors and whether the outdoors was perceived as a gendered environment. The women were university students attending leisure studies classes and ranging in age from 19 to 25. The sample consisted of 5 African-Americans, 2 Asian-Americans, and 29 women of white heritage. The women described a range of gendered behaviors related to the outdoors and discussed common constraints to participation such as fear and the need for partners. With gender as an organizing framework, interpretation of the data exemplify how most women made choices contingent on contexts and relationships, not just their biological female status. However, the impact of changing women's roles, past socialization, and stereotypical gender expectations made the determination of how choices were made difficult. Findings included: (1) women's appreciation of the outdoors was related to exposure to outdoor opportunities as a child, either through family, school, or summer camp experiences; (2) a progression of appreciation, interests, skills, and opportunities in the outdoors was necessary for female involvement but was sometimes impeded by gendered constraints; and (3) most women were optimistic and wanted to believe that the outdoors is a gender-neutral environment, but their experiences sometimes contradicted such idealized attitudes. Contains 25 references. (SV)

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"KIND OF IN THE MIDDLE": THE GENDERED MEANINGS OF THE OUTDOORS FOR WOMEN STUDENTS

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The purpose of this study was to examine the links between past, present, and future involvement for females and perceptions about whether the outdoors was perceived as a gendered environment. Data were collected using five focus group interviews. Several aspects of grounded theory emerged from this study including aspects of exposure to outdoor opportunities as a child, involvement in the outdoors as a result of and resistance to a gendered society, and contradictions between idealized attitudes and the realities of women's involvement in the outdoors.

KEYWORDS: *Gender, outdoors, women, participation, girls, resistance, environment*

INTRODUCTION

Despite gains by women in society, many gendered contradictions about the outdoors exist regarding whether women should claim the outdoors as a place to nurture their physical, emotional, and spiritual identities. Those issues were expressed by this woman of white heritage who has become more involved in the outdoors in recent years:

> Most of the outdoor activities I do, I do with another guy. Or my mom. I don't have any female friends that want to do those things. I think of myself as kind of in the middle. I'm not a tomboy that's out there with all the guys doing that stuff, but yet, I'm not the little girl who won't sit in the rain at the Hootie concert. You know, I'm kind of in the middle.

Historically women have been in the middle. They have been invisible in outdoor pursuits or inaccurately depicted mainly because of the incompatibility between traditional perceptions of female roles and girls' and women's desire to be involved (Henderson & Bialeschki, 1995). For example, we have seldom heard the history about how some middle and upper class white women at the turn of the century lived two lives as explorers and as gentle women (Kaufman, 1986; LaBastille, 1980; Lynch, 1987). Until recently, women have remained mostly invisible, with the outdoors seen as a male domain unless females were involved as helpmates. Women have traditionally made few demands for outdoor recreation, but many have been involved quietly for a number of years.

The changes brought about by the contemporary women's movement of the past thirty years have resulted in a new visibility about women in the outdoors as well as in other areas of leisure involvement. Many individuals like to think that the outdoors is no longer a male do-

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main. Yet, we know little about how young women of today perceive themselves as females in the outdoors or how their cultural identities might define their experiences. We also do not know the meanings that many females associate with the outdoors related to the changing roles and status of women in society.

The purpose of this study was to examine whether gendered meanings exist for females regarding outdoor recreation. For this study, the definition of outdoor recreation included all freely chosen activities that occur in a natural and/or remote outdoor environment. The definition further included a continuum of opportunities that ranges from walks in a community park to wilderness expeditions. These pursuits included informal gatherings in the outdoors with friends and family to involvement through structured organizations. Females may participate in all women, co-ed, and/or family group involvements. In addition, outdoor activities may be for women of all ages.

According to Roberts and Bialeschki (1995), most of the research on women in the outdoors until now has concerned five primary topics: leadership/guiding, gender, effects on women, constraints/barriers, and all women groups. Research about gender and the outdoors has largely focused on gender differences (e.g., Henderson & Bialeschki, 1987; Jordan, 1992; Knapp, 1995; Mitten, 1986) with some conceptual studies that have examined what being female means (e.g., Bialeschki & Henderson, 1993; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1995; Holzwarth, 1993; Mitten, 1992).

The value of this current study is twofold. First, we empirically explored the potential gendered meanings of female involvement in the outdoors that often has been examined intuitively rather than empirically. Second, the respondents in this study represented a variety of involvements in the outdoors ranging from females who loved the outdoors to those who said they absolutely did not enjoy spending time in the outdoors. We wanted to understand meanings related to the links between past, present, and future involvement for females and perceptions about whether the outdoors was perceived as a gendered environment.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Quantitative statistics provide evidence about the evolving participation patterns of women in the outdoors. For example, in the 1990's all aspects of outdoor recreation participation are expected to rise faster for females than males. Hunting is the only activity that has less female participation than males although popular current literature suggests that more women are becoming hunters as well (Begley, 1995). The 1995 Human Powered Outdoor Recreation State of the Industry Report (Widdekind, 1995) showed statistics indicating that 6% of the female population in the US backpacks, 35% bicycle, 7% canoe, 22% hike, 4% Nordic ski, 2% do rock climbing, and 80% walk for pleasure. Further, this recent research along with other studies, suggested that the most significant determinant of involvement is whether or not participation in outdoor recreation occurs with the family as a child. About two-thirds of those who recreate outdoors were introduced to their favorite outdoor activity before the age of 17, and half of those before the age of eight (Widdekind, 1995).

These statistics prove the increasing value of the outdoors for women, but they tell us little about the experience that women have in the outdoors. Past literature offers some insight about the positive effects of outdoor involvement on women (e.g., Cole, Erdman, & Rothblum, 1994; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1986; Miranda & Yerkes, 1982). Research data as well as testimonials, describe the social rewards, empowerment, health benefits, therapeutic outcomes, stress management, freedom, and sense of community that develops as a result of the outdoors. These outcomes probably are not different for men, although sometimes women may experience them in a different way (Henderson, 1992).

Similarly, a large body of literature has developed around the understanding of constraints related to outdoor pursuits (e.g., Bialeschki & Henderson, 1993; Roberts & Drogin, 1993;

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Warren, 1985). A constraint is anything that inhibits people's ability to participate in activities, to take advantage of opportunities, or to achieve a desired level of satisfaction. Different constraints have different impacts upon groups of women. Examples of constraints discussed are: an ethic of care often influenced by family responsibilities, gender expectations related to definitions of femininity and masculinity in society, lack of skills and opportunities, and physical and psychological fears for safety. Most of these intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural fears relate to some aspect of being female in relation to the outdoors.

Although a growing literature base about women's involvement in the outdoors has emerged in the past ten years, an area where understanding is lacking relates to sophisticated analyses of gender, not as sex differences, but as the social meanings of being female in a changing society (Henderson, 1994). Gender refers to cultural connections associated with one's biological sex. Thus, when biological sex is determined at birth as female or male, cultural expectations are associated immediately with the child. Further, gender is an ongoing process rather than an inborn biological trait. The meaning of gender is constructed by society and each of us is socialized into that construction. Gender scholarship addresses the complexity of expectations, roles, and behavior associated with being male as well as being female.

Conducting research with gender as the focus, however, requires that we acknowledge the meaning of being female as a fluctuating, not a fixed state. Being female has varied historically and contextually. Assuming that all females experience outdoor recreation in the same way is risky. One's biological sex alone does not determine behavior, rather it is the way that an individual interprets his or her gender that is important (Henderson, 1994). Race, age, education, cultural background, and other characteristics affect each female's experience in a way that cannot be generalized to all other females. Using gender as a central focus in examining the experiences of females along with other aspects of identity such as race can give us insights into understanding deeper meanings about the outdoors.

METHODS

An interpretive paradigm was the basis for this research study. Symbolic interactionism provided the framework for collecting data. According to Blumer (1969), symbolic interactionism assumes that human beings are conscious, feeling, thinking, and reflective subjects. People impute meanings about what is happening around them and how they are interacting with others. Specifically, symbolic interactionism was used to explore the relationships that young women had, are currently having, and expect to have with the outdoors.

Data were collected using group interviews, popularly referred to as focus groups (Henderson, 1991). The values of this method include its socially oriented procedure, allowances for the moderator to probe, low cost, speedy results, and the opportunity to use a fairly large sample in smaller group units (Krueger, 1988). We collected data during September 1995 from five focus groups composed of a total of 36 women who had varying experiences in their involvement with the outdoors. Each focus group ranging in size from 6-8 people met for 75 minutes and was facilitated by two leaders. A sample of the questions asked is found in Table 1. The focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed.

In addition to a set of semi-structured focus group questions, the participants also completed a short questionnaire that asked their attitudes about the outdoors as well as participation and demographic information. We used the quantitative data primarily to describe the sample. A convenience sample was used to try to get a broad range of responses from female students at a large southern research university. The qualitative data were the basis for the data analysis.

The 36 female students were recruited from four classes taught by leisure studies faculty. Recreation majors were the majority of one class, but the other three were non-recreation

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TABLE 1

Focus Group Questions Guide

- Tell us a little about your involvement in the outdoors
- Is your involvement in outdoor activities too much, too little, or just right? Explain.
- When you were a child, did you participate in any kind of organized outdoor experience like attending a camp or going school camping? Describe that experience or why you might not have had that experience.
- What do other family members do in the outdoors? Are they active in the outdoors?
- How did other people influence your attitude toward and involvement in the outdoors?
- How does whether you were a "tomboy" or not relate to your involvement in the outdoors?
- What prevents you from enjoying the outdoors in all the ways that you might like?
- Is your outdoor involvement different because you are female than if you had been male?
- What do you hope your future involvement in the outdoors will be?
- What other issues or ideas has this discussion raised that might be of help to us in trying to understand the involvement of women in the outdoors?

major populations. In recruiting participants, we encouraged individuals who were not experienced in the outdoors to participate in the focus groups as well as individuals who were interested. All participants signed informed consents and received a small monetary stipend for their involvement in the interview. The sample consisted of 5 African-American students, 2 Asian-American students, and 29 women of white heritage. All the students were between the ages of 19-25 with 30 individuals being 20 or 21 years old. Ten students grew up in a large city, 10 in a medium city, 13 in a small town, and two on farms. Thirty-one had attended camp as a child and 21 had been a counselor at camp. Thirty-one of the students said they loved the outdoors with 5 who did not care about it. The number of outdoor recreation activities done as children in the outdoors ranged from two activities to 14 with a median of seven different activities. The number of outdoor activities done in the past year ranged from one to 11 with a median of five activities.

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HYPERQUAL2 was used to organize and analyze the data. The analyses of most interest to the researchers pertained to

examining how the outdoors was perceived in a past, present, and future context and how gender helped to underscore the involvement or lack of involvement of young women. HYPERQUAL2 allowed for the coding of the data in many ways so that the linkages could be examined in developing the grounded theory that emerged in the study. We noted something about the background of students where appropriate, but we did not make any direct comparisons across demographic characteristics since comparisons were not the purpose of this qualitative study.

Although analyzing ethnic comparisons was not the focus of this study, we noted the racial identity of the respondents for several reasons. By describing the race of the study participants, we were able to recognize different aspects of female experiences. In addition, to date most studies pertaining to women in the outdoors have focused on women of white heritage. Although much work needs to be done examining the intersection of race, class, and gender in the outdoors, we wanted to acknowledge the racial identity of the respondents to give visibility to the potential cultural nature of the responses. In considering gender as the central theoretical framework, our interpretations showed how some women's experiences led them to make choices contingent on contexts and relationships, not just because they were biologically female or male. Further, our intent was not to compare females and males or women of color and white women, but to examine the possible contexts that surrounded being female and being involved in the outdoors.

RESULTS

This analyses focused around the young women's reflections of their past, perceptions of their present, and expectations about their future involvement within a gendered context. Examples of these themes are presented with conclusions that provide some grounded theory for summarizing the gendered meanings of the outdoors.

Reflections on Past Involvement

Focus group members initially were asked questions to ascertain how they were involved with the outdoors. Past involvement revealed a variety of responses from the participants. The two primary influences about growing up related to the young women's involvement with family and youth organizations, although not all women in the study had outdoor recreation opportunities. Several respondents discussed what it meant not having much contact with the outdoors while growing up. One student of white heritage who currently does not enjoy the outdoors explicitly stated, "I've had very little experience in the outdoors. I don't like to be in the woods, I've never spent any time in the woods." A student of white heritage offered this analysis:

> And they [people who didn't grow up involved in the outdoors] don't appreciate the outdoors like people that were brought up in it. How you were brought up has a lot to do with it. When you're brought up outdoors I think you're going to appreciate it when you're older and stay with it. I was outside all the time, and that's how I am now, I can't get enough.

Within the contexts of little involvement, as well as family and youth organization activities, other gendered reflections also emerged.

Family

Some individuals were active outdoors with their families while others had few family experiences. Comments included such positive statements as this one by a woman of white heritage who grew up in a city, "My parents loved to camp so we went camping a lot when I was growing up." A similar anecdote described an active white outdoor family:

> Sometimes on Friday mornings he'd [dad] wake us up and say, "Packing up for somewhere cold for three days." And then he'd get in the car and we'd drive...most of the time we ended up in the mountains because that's what we liked.

Another student of white heritage who is a recreation major illustrated her family's involvement in this way:

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> For my family it [the outdoors] was really a spiritual place. Everybody else went to church on Sunday and we always went on a hike on Sunday and that's what we were taught. This is what your higher power is—everything out there.

One young white woman who had limited experience in the outdoors growing up but really enjoys it today said, "I think the biggest family thing was like, to go fishing. We'd go out there and bait a hook and pull the fish out and sit outside and clean all the fish and it was just a big Sunday afternoon thing to do." In contrast, an African-American student who said she is indifferent about the outdoors today commented "I guess my family really, they're not really outdoor people...So, I've been fishing a couple of times and I didn't like it too well. But, we always go on picnics and stuff, but I'm not outdoors a lot." Family outdoor activities were not popular with this student of white heritage who currently says she likes the outdoors as long as the weather cooperates: "I used to have to go camping and I hated it, especially when it would rain. I can't stand it when it pours and when it's cold and damp and you smell bad and all that kind of stuff."

Camps and Youth Organization Involvement

A second major influence that young women described was their involvements with camping and youth organizations. Several described how these organizations complimented their family ventures and others described structured camp influences that were not all positive.

A combination of family and other structured outdoor activities was influential as described by this woman of white heritage who continues to be active in the outdoors today:

> My influence has been a combination of things because first of all, my family is a farm family and so everything we've ever done that I can remember has been outdoors. That's been work and play. They [parents] don't believe in room service, my parents are real rugged down to earth people. But then, I really like high risk activities outdoors. And I think some of these things, I was introduced to through camps...It kind of all fitted together—I was introduced to being in the outdoors through being with my parents and the more risky activities didn't have anything to do with them.

In a similar way, another white student who loves the outdoors today noted, "I learned a lot of stuff through the Girl Scouts. I mean, every time we went camping, my parents did all the work. But with the Girls Scouts, we had to do the cooking and we had to clean up and go pack the backpacks and everything."

Because her family was not too keen on the outdoors, an Asian-American student said that she is active in the outdoors today as a result of organized school activities. She commented, "My father, the extent of his outdoor experience is gardening and that's it. My mother and father, when we travel we stay in really nice hotels...[but] camping was a really big part of my high school experience." Similarly, a student of white heritage who is more active in the outdoors today than ever before said, "I went to Girl Scout camp [because] the extent of my parents experience in the outdoors was walking the dog."

Other individuals talked about how a positive or negative outcome of camping with youth organizations did not matter, but just having any kind of outdoor experience seemed to provide an appreciation for the outdoors that carried over into their lives today. For example, one white student said, "I went to camp twice and I hated it both times, but I guess that didn't make much of a difference. I still love the outdoors today." In addition, one student of white heritage who loves the outdoors today described her perception of the impact of Girl Scout camping as:

> We did have to deal with the bugs and things that a lot of people would be squeamish about [but], I got over the negative side. I thought it was a little bit exciting, there were things that you had to deal with, but I really enjoyed it.

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Other Issues About Growing Up

Issues of gender were evident when some of the students described their childhood experiences. Tomboyism as an aspect of the outdoors emerged several times in the focus groups. Most of the females agreed that a female did not have to perceive herself as a "tomboy" to enjoy the outdoors, but it helped. None of the women in any of the focus groups verbalized a negative stigma attached to being a tomboy, although not everyone in the focus groups noted or commented about the notion. An African-American student who grew up in a small town said, "I used to be a tomboy, I'm not going to lie. I climbed the trees, I mean I could climb a tree and go anywhere the guys could go." A similar comment was made by a female of white heritage:

> I would spend 90% of the day in the woods. I sort of hung out with all the guys in the neighborhood, there weren't many girls...we would camp out in the woods and play in the creek ...but as I grew older it dwindled where I didn't do a lot of woodsy stuff.

A white student told this story: "I used to go fishing with my dad. I'm the youngest of three girls and I was like, I was a tomboy when I was little, I was like his little boy." Another white student, however, countered some of these ideas by describing her interests and traditional femininity, "When I think of the prissiest woman in the world, she can still like the outdoors. I don't think it [being a tomboy] has anything to do with it [being in the outdoors]."

Some gender issues concerning growing up were also evident in comments made about all female groups. One woman of white heritage who attended camp every summer remarked, "[Camp] was all girls and you just stayed in separate cabins and being in the woods and you didn't care what you looked like." An Asian-American student offered a gender based comparison about the Boy Scouts and the Girls Scouts:

> The Boy Scouts, they don't take it, they're like, "Deal with it." You see a bear, you see a bear and you scream and that's it, and then you move on. With the Girls Scouts, it's like, they hold your hand so much, they don't let you do very much of anything.

From another point of view, a woman of white heritage who grew up in a large city and was a camper for several summers said:

> A lot of my experiences were with the Girl Scouts and so for all of the years that I was a camper and a counselor, it was always all girls. And so for me it was never, "You can't do this because you were a girl." I just never thought of it that way because there was never anything I couldn't do just because I was a girl.

Issues of gender seemed to be evident for some of the women retrospectively as they described how they grew up. None of the women, however, admitted that being female had necessarily been a detriment to them during their youth. During the focus groups, several of the women indicated that they had never really thought about the possible influence of gender on their involvement in the outdoors.

Present Perceptions of Outdoor Involvement

When the participants described on the questionnaire their level of outdoor participation from the past to the present, eight students said it had increased, four individuals indicated no change, and 24 noted a decrease. An explanation of the lives of the students interviewed helped us understand more about the continuity or lack of continuity of their outdoor involvements over time. Some of these changes related to gender issues, but other factors affected what the young women were currently experiencing regarding the outdoors.

Increases in involvement often were associated with new opportunities. For example, one woman of white heritage said that she got involved with the outdoors after high school because she had the opportunity to be a counselor and go to camp for the first time, "I learned how to canoe and do a ropes course and so I was kind of like learning to be a kid all over again." The majority of young women in this study, however, described their outdoor activity as de-

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creasing due to a number of common and gender-related constraints.

Common Constraints

Constraints are complex phenomena. For this analysis, we noted individuals who were constrained and did not necessarily care to participate in the outdoors more as well as individuals who wanted to be more involved, but were constrained for a variety of reasons. The perceptions of both types of individuals were noted as we examined constraints to outdoor involvement.

Women whose involvement had decreased and who were not interested in outdoor pursuits generally indicated their continuing discomfort with the outdoors. An African-American woman said, "I mean I like the outdoors. I go outside to think. I'll go outside just to walk around. I'm interested, it's just the temperature I don't like." A woman of white heritage said:

> I don't like to be out in the woods because I don't like bugs and I'm afraid of snakes...like if I walk to the woods I feel like I have bugs crawling all over me... I just don't find it fun to be outside doing much of anything if I'm sweating to death or freezing to death.

Regarding constraints for women who wanted to do more but couldn't, several common constraints emerged that have been uncovered in other studies. Specifically, time and money were mentioned frequently by this group of students. One quote by a woman of white heritage that typified the attitude of several of the young women was:

> I have a lot of things that I want to try in the future but I've not gotten to because of maybe time restrictions or monetary restrictions. Like I would love to go backpacking and stay gone for two weeks but I can't afford all the equipment and stuff.

Related to time and money was the issue of planning that several women discussed. One young woman of white heritage who had gone to summer camp for ten years said, "It takes a lot of time to plan these things [outdoor activities] and a lot of times it involves travel to certain places. And I don't like to be alone either and it involves getting a group together and that takes time." Another white woman remarked, "That's something else nice about going with your family because they planned it and you just went along and it was so easy and you didn't really have a choice and you just went anyway."

Needing Partners for Participation

Although having friends to participate with is a common constraint to leisure for many people, the experiences described by the women in this study reflected a dilemma that was often gender-based. Lack of partners was also associated with fear and a lack of opportunities.

One individual of white heritage who grew up in a small town and had done most of her previous outdoor activities with her family said, "Most of my girlfriends have got boyfriends right now and I've just come out of a relationship so I'm pretty much strained and they're always doing things with their boyfriends." Another woman stated, "My friends don't have time either or they don't think it's [outdoors] important so there's really no one for me to do it with." She went on to say, "I'm not really going to take off and go somewhere alone and go out in the woods alone, especially, you know, the way things are today."

Fear often was the basis for needing partners in the outdoors. This fear generally revolved around gender-based notions. Contradictions were apparent, however, in some of the issues about fear that the female students raised. For example, one woman of white heritage who grew up in a city was not aware of how fear changed her life when she said:

> I don't think about being raped or attacked or being assaulted or anything when I go walking by myself. I mean I just make sure I don't do it where there are not street lights if I'm walking on a street. But most of my activities I do during the day, I just don't think about it.

Another woman of white heritage said, "I would not walk around Raleigh if I was by myself alone. But I would go to the mountains and just walk."

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Other women were clear about their fears regarding the outdoors and how it related to them being female. One woman lamented, "I just feel like I couldn't do some of the activities by myself that I would like to do." Another white woman who had previously described the outdoors as a liberating experience during the focus group said, "I wouldn't want to camp by myself. I don't really know why, I guess at night, being out there alone by yourself with nothing around you to protect you except maybe a stick." A woman of white heritage summed up this gendered fear issue by stating:

> I told one of my guy friends that I wish I was a guy because it's just not fair. You know, I should have lived a long time ago when I could have done all these things alone...I mean the most fun to me is just seeing new places and doing new things, but I can't really do that alone.

Gender Expectations and the Outdoors

Even though fear was a gendered constraint, most of the women interviewed indicated that they did not perceive the outdoors today as the primary domain of males with females not welcome. Most respondents felt that females were as likely to be involved as males in most outdoor pursuits other than perhaps hunting. One woman, for example, said:

> I don't know why, I just can't see too many guys saying, "I'm going on a nature walk." I can't see too many women saying "I'm going out deer hunting"...and there are those activities that are kind of equal like white water rafting and canoeing.

Similarly, a woman of white heritage who grew up in a small town indicated that if people thought of the outdoors as a man's world it was "that they're thinking about hunting and fishing. They're not thinking about the whole thing like nature walks, hiking, rafting, canoeing." Another white woman noted that females may get involved in stereotypes that suggest that you should not "be strong and go out and do all that stuff, the outdoorsy stuff" even though this stereotype had not inhibited her at all.

Hunting was an issue that raised reactions among the women who were interviewed. Hunting was considered a "male thing" because as one woman of white heritage stated, "Females, at least from my experience, they don't seem to want to go out and kill a big bear or something." Another woman talked about hunting as being a way for men to "claim their manhood." Another sentiment was expressed by a woman of white heritage who did not enjoy the outdoors. She said, "I feel terrible when I pull a little fish up and I know it's going to die and things like that."

Related to gender as a possible constraint for women in the outdoors was the idea that men are more inclined and encouraged to buy equipment necessary for outdoor activities. One woman of white heritage, who is not as active today in the outdoors as she was in the past, remarked that the outdoors "isn't being sold to women." She said, "When you go into an outdoor store, I'd say three-fourths is for guys. There's this little section for females and the rest is for guys."

Two of the women interviewed thought women were different from men when they were in the outdoors and this was a positive benefit. One Asian-American woman noted that "females are a lot easier to deal with." She described how on a hiking trip other women were encouraging, supportive, and positive influences that helped her along when she needed it. The men on that trip had not been helpful.

Entitlement and the Ungendered Outdoors

Almost all of the women interviewed expressed that they felt entitled to outdoor experiences whether they chose to be involved or not. Many of the students did not feel that as females they were discriminated against or at a disadvantage concerning their outdoor recreation opportunities.

Several women did not feel there were any gender differences in the outdoors. An African-American woman remarked about her perceptions of how times have changed:

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> A lot of things are coming about. Mostly, we've found them [women] inside the house or around the yard like I said with my grandmother. But you're finding that more of them are going whitewater rafting, hiking, backpacking, and things like that. It's because the door is open for them. A lot of people think that sharp tools and things like that are just used, men can only handle them because the woman is very gentle and she may hurt herself and stuff like that. But we just have to show that we're equal. I mean, yes, men have more strength in some areas than women do but we all have our places that we fit. And I'm pretty sure there is a place for woman outdoors and we have to let it be more known.

Several women clearly resisted the idea that the outdoors might be gendered. One woman of white heritage said, "If I want to do something, I'm going to do it and I just don't put any kinds of limits or restrictions on myself. I just don't, if it's there and I have an opportunity to do it, I'm going to do it." Another woman talked about not wanting to be the whiny woman in the woods even though she was afraid of spiders—in not wanting to be the stereotyped female, she said, "It makes you do more and makes you get out there." An Asian-American woman said, "I never felt limited...And I've proved a lot of people wrong by doing things they didn't think I could do."

Thus, regardless of amount of involvement, most of the young women interviewed did not want to believe that the outdoors was gendered although their statements about present involvement and their perceptions indicated that some questions clearly existed in their minds. Even though they saw the world as having changed, it was evident that stereotypes about the outdoors still existed to some extent.

Expectations about the Future

Conjecturing about the future is often difficult. Yet to understand aspects about the outdoors, it was useful to examine what these young women saw ahead for themselves. Those women who did not have an interest and appreciation for the outdoors presently were not likely to want to obtain a different involvement in the future. One woman's apprehension related to skill, "I think it's kind of scary sometimes to venture out and do something...lack of knowledge I guess. I just wouldn't know exactly what to do." She did not think that it would be easy for her to learn.

All of the young women who were involved currently in the outdoors indicated that they would like to see their involvement increase in the future. For example, one woman of white heritage said, "I think I'm just going to continue on the things I've always had. I've always been involved and I'm sure I always will." Most females in the study acknowledged the value of the outdoors and said they would participate more in the future if others were available to share the experience.

A number of women commented, often unprompted, about what they would like for their children in the outdoors if they had children someday. A common idea expressed was, "I would like to see my family being outdoors because, it's nice. And I think you should have a certain appreciation for it." A woman of white heritage said, "I have no clue what I'm going to be, where I'm going to be, but I really enjoy being outside and climbing mountains and stuff and I'm definitely going to expose my children to that." An African-American female stated that she didn't know if she would be able to involve her children because of her attitude about the outdoors. She said, "And I'm not too convinced about that if I have little girls. I mean because they're going to be around me and I'm always going to squirm every time I see a bug, so, I mean, most likely they probably will too." Most of the students agreed that they did not want to force the outdoors on their children, but that they wanted them to feel comfortable in the outdoors even if they themselves did not. For example, a woman of white heritage who does not enjoy the outdoors said:

> I would hope that I could raise children that are comfortable outdoors and who could just run in the woods and have a good time.... I would like to be more comfortable in the outdoors, so the thought of spending the af-

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ternoon in the woods wasn't a horrifying thing.

Although concern for one's future family was a gendered type of socialization, none of the women differentiated about the gender of their children except the one who was afraid she was more likely to pass her fear of bugs to her daughters than sons. The comments of these women suggest that future generations of women may not experience either behaviors or attitudes that would connote a gendered outdoors.

CONCLUSIONS

This study provided information to describe a range of gendered behaviors that relate to women in the outdoors. With gender as an organizing theoretical framework, our interpretations exemplified how most women made choices contingent on contexts and relationships, not just because they were biologically female. The impact of changing women's roles, past socialization, and stereotypical gender expectations, however, made the determination of how choices were made difficult. The research adds some depth to understanding the breadth of outdoor involvement for women. New definitions of outdoor meanings will likely emerge as more females resist gendered expectations and develop appreciations, interests, skills, and opportunities in the outdoors.

Several aspects of grounded theory about women in the outdoors emerged from this study. First, a prerequisite to developing an appreciation of the outdoors for women revolved around having exposure to outdoor opportunities as a child. The findings regarding past experience indicated that the young women in this study had a variety of opportunities for outdoor involvement as they grew up. Regardless of whether their outdoor experiences were positive or negative, the exposure to the outdoors seemed to be an important element in how they said they participated today. As indicated by other studies (e.g., Widdekind, 1995), a relationship existed between involvement as a child and future involvement in the outdoors, but this involvement varied greatly among the participants in this study.

Brightbill (1963) suggested that a progression of appreciation, interests, skills, and then opportunities must exist if an individual is to learn to "love" a leisure activity. Therefore, a second grounded theory conclusion is that appreciation, interests, skills, and opportunities in the outdoors develop for females as both a result of and resistance to a gendered society. If appreciations and interests are not developed and females do not feel entitled to learn skills and pursue opportunities, then the outdoors cannot be a context for female involvement. On the other hand, some women who are interested do not have a chance to develop skills or find opportunities due to common as well as gendered constraints. A progression of learning from others, experimentation, and practice appeared to be necessary for the females in this study if they were to resist potential gendered stereotypes of the outdoors and seek positive experiences.

Third, most young women wanted to believe that the outdoors is a gender neutral environment although their involvements often reflected a contradiction in this consciousness between idealized attitudes and the realities of their situations. The students interviewed did not want to see the outdoors as a gendered place although as females, many acknowledged that the outdoors may be more a male domain than a female domain in regard to how it has been traditionally defined. Some women clearly resisted the idea that the outdoors was a male thing and wanted women's visibility to overshadow previous stereotypes. A contradiction existed between the ideal of a gender neutral environment and problems related to stereotypes in the outdoors, fear issues, and difficulty in finding outdoor partners. A sense of "kind of in the middle" was evident in the responses of these women. The females in this study were optimistic, however, about the changing nature of women's visibility in the outdoors. For example, one woman of white heritage summarized this notion:

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> I think we are one of the first generations that are able to go out and do it, that have the skills and have the knowledge and don't have the fear necessarily, or the stigma attached to it, as much as years past. I think we've already made a small stretch and I think we are lucky for that.

We noted some differences in participation levels based on race, although any definitive comparisons were not possible given the nature of the research. Seven individuals in the sample were women of color. The African-American students in this study generally were involved less in outdoor pursuits other than family picnics. The two Asian-American students, on the other hand, seemed to love the outdoors and desired to spend much more time there in the future. Issues of race surfaced twice during the interviews. In explaining the lack of involvement of African American students, two observations were made by students. One African American student who grew up in a large city and who was indifferent about the outdoors, noted how it was "kinda racial" because she did not want to be in the sun and get any darker than she was. She also did not like to get her hair sweaty and wet and have to try to "get it back the way I want it to be." Another African-American student indicated:

> You don't see a lot of black people hiking or mountain climbing. You get to the point where there's this stigma that that's not what you do...if I have the opportunity sometime in my life, I would like to do them [outdoor activities]. I think there's a stigma on the things that African-Americans do.

Although more is being written about the involvement of people of color in the outdoors, their relative invisibility seems to perpetuate this stigma. The combination of gender and racial invisibility may be like "double jeopardy" for women of color in the outdoors. Although a small sample, the women of color in this study represented a range of opinions about the outdoors and the meanings it may or may not bring to their lives. The racial background of the students provided some additional information, but few conclusions about racial differences were drawn from these data.

More information about gender, gender relations, and the stigma attached to gender will help us understand outdoor experiences better in the future. This future research can help us understand what being "kind of in the middle" means regarding the influence of gender for both females and males. Whether a female participates alone or with a group, the outdoors is a place where girls and women can set goals, step out of traditional gender expectations, and make empowering choices that can carry over for a lifetime.

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